

Time out of Mind (PSB)

Time out of Mind is very powerful and may well be the best Dylan album since Blood on the Tracks. It is the best album I've heard in the '90s. In fact, it's far funkier and grittier than 95% of the blues albums released over the past decade.

Where there was hope on Blood on the Tracks, it appears to have been replaced by resignation on Time out of Mind. Time out of Mind can be seen as claustrophobic. There is not only the weather references, but in just about every song Dylan is going crazy in one way or another. I noticed the "Walking" theme almost immediately. But I think the key to the title is the "Out of Mind" part. On every song (with the possible exception of "Make You Feel My Love," the only time he sort of comes up for air, he is clearly and plainly going out of his mind in blunt unapologetic terms. Death or the last chapter of life is obviously on his mind, the light is bad, situations are never right, love doesn't seem to work. The alienated character in Highlands sums it up, but sums it up with humor.

On this record Dylan knew what he wanted and went for it and actually told the musicians what he wanted them to do. On Blood on the Tracks, Dylan just played the songs and all the musicians could do was follow and this pretty much applies to both the New York and Minnesota sessions.

The new album is not that musically varied, most of the songs are blues-based and three of them are quite similar - built around riffs that pretty much come from Howlin' Wolf. I can understand people seeing certain songs on Time Out Of Mind as filler. The best songs which to me are Tryin' To Get To Heaven, Not Dark Yet and Standing In The Doorway, followed by Cold Iron Bounds and Highlands are really, really great. Love Sick is better a lot of the time in concert as are the blues tunes. While for awhile they made Cold Iron Bounds kind of this show stopper in concert, it lost the Howlin' Wolf funky feel of the original.

I only find one song on that album approaching the unlistenable category, and with the exception of that one song, and the other two songs which appear to be everyone's favorites namely "Not Dark Yet" and "Trying To Get To Heaven," it is important to remember that Time Out Of Mind is for the most part both musically and soundwise a blues album. And the songs that a lot of people seem to regard as filler should be seen in the context of blues songs. I view "Time Out of Mind" as essentially a blues album with a couple of ballads, and everything about the album from the packaging to the old style Columbia label to replicating the sound of old blues records suggests that. But the blues are real songs. Try telling Buddy Guy or BB King they're not.

The influence of Howlin' Wolf on some of the blues songs on TOOM is direct and clear, particularly in the sound of the band and even goes back to such other Dylan songs as "10,000 Men" and "Trouble." Howlin' Wolf was as great in his way as Leadbelly was in his, and there's few better people to aim for. And to get technical, while Leadbelly sang the blues he was not strictly a blues singer. Like Mississippi John Hurt, he was what some folklorists term a "songster." The Wolf however *was* a bluesman, and a bluesman of the highest order.

Dylan has played both the country blues and the city blues, blues that originated with blacks and blues that originated with whites, and there is a difference though they are all connected. Wolf's trademark moan came right out of Jimmie Rodgers' yodels. Still, while in the recent past, probably more whites than blacks have been carrying on the country and delta blues traditions, the origins are black. However, music (thankfully) is not about such divisions and boundaries and one of Dylan's greatest accomplishments (along with several other artists, both black and white) is to break down these boundaries. If you read the biographies of the great (for lack of a better term) roots-oriented musicians whether Bill Monroe, Elvis Presley, Muddy Waters,

Ray Charles or B.B. King to name a few, you'll find that all of them listened and learned from all kinds of musicians. Country music, blues, gospel and rock 'n' roll in all their forms and descendants are linked.

Bob Dylan has been a blues singer from the very beginning of his career. He has also been a great traditional ballad singer, country singer and rock 'n' roll singer among many other things. But the blues had run through his music more consistently than any other form. If you get to the basics of most of the songs on Highway 61 Revisited for example, the structure is blues. The same can be said of Time Out of Mind, Slow Train Coming or innumerable other albums.

That said, this is the first Dylan album in centuries where he truly paid attention to what he wanted in the music as well as the production. Some people have spoken about the production being in layers. Not true. Not if you really listen. The album was cut live. The musicians were not allowed to redo parts (and that is a quote from one of the musicians). And it is obvious to me that each track was paid attention to in terms of sound, whether the raw roadhouse feel of "Dirt Road" or the more Chess-studio type sound of some of the other tracks. They really got what they were going after, both in music and in sound and while some of the songs have a "swamp" feel and a definite spooky quality, it doesn't have the buried, somewhat muddy sound of say "Political World," which I always felt could've been much better. The only track where Dylan's voice is sort of buried is "Cold Iron Bound" and I think that was deliberate as part of the sound of the track.

Daniel Lanois met Bob in New York prior to the sessions which were in Miami and read him the lyrics. Dylan's arrangements are almost always improvised. I have it on very good authority that Dylan told the musicians what he wanted them to do, and knew what he wanted. However, Lanois did say that Dylan would pull his usual trick of changing the key for the actual recording from what the band rehearsed it in. Jon Pareles also said that Dylan would put the songs in harder keys for guitarists to play such as B flat. Lanois agreed with this, and said Dylan felt that if the musicians were playing in a harder key that they would become more inspired and perhaps discover something they hadn't discovered in the rehearsal prior to the actual take. He also said Dylan felt the musicians were good enough to deal with sudden key changes. Dylan said the songs could be done up or down, and in various styles, waltz, samba, whatever, which to me is typical Dylan. As an another aside, from the same 'authority', every take was completely different. if it was slow the first time, it would be fast the second, vice versa, or have a completely different feel.

I have a sneaking suspicion that Lanois (a well-documented control freak) didn't necessarily get his way on this album, but I could be wrong. Lanois also said that Dylan is an eccentric and the sessions were a roller coaster ride

I have this record my mom bought when I was a kid that's an Alan Lomax album with Peggy Seeger, Guy Carawan and some other people called Folk Song Saturday Night. There are many other songs on that album that Dylan has either referred to or performed such as "The Two Sisters" and "Mary Anne." This record is a key for Time out of Mind. "Trying To Get To Heaven" is almost entirely composed of lines from old folk songs and Peggy Seeger sings the song Riding In A Buggy With Mary Jane on that album.

The first verse is:

Ridin' in a buggy with Mary Jane, Mary Jane, Mary Jane
Ridin' in a buggy with Mary Jane, I'm a long way from home

The second verse is:

I've got a house in Baltimore, Baltimore Baltimore
I've got a house in Baltimore, it's 16 stories high

One of the things about old folk songs is that verses get passed around from song to song. The Weavers used to call these "zipper verses" because you could just zip them in.

But there's a bunch of other songs on this one album that either he covered or used lines from, so if I'd ever interviewed Dylan I would love to just say, "You ever see this record?"

Bob Dylan's music has always been steeped in the blues right from his first album. A large percentage of his music has always been blues or blues based. Most (not all) of his "rock and roll" songs are structurally blues songs. Of his studio albums (not counting Dylan) only *Desire* lacks a song that is blues in structure, and if he had included the outtakes "Rita Mae" or "Catfish" that would've been out the window.

It's going to be very interesting when the outtakes, which are supposed to be completely different, at least in terms of feel, finally surface (See Tell Tale Signs review).